ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Žena obětí muže „lovce“ a „konzumenta“ v románech Margaret Atwoodové - *Žena k nakousnutí* a *Z hlubin*

The victimization of women by men - “hunters” and “consumers” - in Margaret Atwood’s novels *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing*

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Prague, 22nd August 2011

Many thanks to Klára Kolinská, PhD for her supervision and the freedom she gave me during my work on the thesis.

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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Abstrakt

Bakalářská práce se zabývá ranou tvorbou kanadské spisovatelky Margaret Atwoodové – romány *Žena k nakousnutí* (1969) a *Z hlubin* (1972). Práce se zaměřuje na viktimizaci a objektifikaci ženských postav skrze fotografování a konzumaci. Tato dvě témata jsou stěžejní pro dvě kapitoly statě bakalářské práce. První kapitola se zabývá teorií fotografie Susan Sontagové a Rolanda Bartha a aplikuje ji na oba romány. Pomocí fotoaparátu či kamery získává muž nad ženou nadvládu. Podobně jako střelná zbraň je fotoaparát jednoduše ovládán pomocí spouště, která přemění osobu svého zájmu na trofej – předmět v neměnné pozici, se kterým lze lehce manipulovat. Práce se proto také zabývá podobnostmi mezi ženskými a zvířecími obětmi a lovením. Roland Barthes se ve *Světlé komoře* (1980) věnuje pozóváním před fotografem. Je přesvědčen, že v momentu fotografování ze sebe osoba čekající na stisknutí spouště sama vytvoří objekt a ztrácí tak své vlastní já – s touto verzí vyobrazené osoby může fotograf potom naložit podle sebe. Pohled fotoaparátu a kamery je bezohledný a kořistnický, což je v práci rozvedeno pomocí feministické teorie Laury Mulveyové, která ve své antologii *Vizuální a jiné slasti* (1989) tvrdí, že fotoaparát je nástavbou mužského objektifikujícího pohledu.

Druhá kapitola se zabývá konzumací. Hlavním argumentem pro tuto kapitolu je teorie takzvaného „nepřítomného referenta“ Carol J. Adamsové, kterou popisuje ve své knize *Sexuální politika masa* (1990). Ženské postavy Margaret Atwoodové tak lze vnímat jako maso, které každý konzumuje bez přímé asociace k jeho původu – žijícímu zvířeti. Adamsová zmiňuje stádia vedoucí ke konzumaci; je to objektifikace, fragmentace a následná konzumace. Aby mohl člověk bez obtíží zkonzumovat zvíře, musí ho nejprve vnímat jako něco jiného než živý subjekt, potom si ho musí naporcovat, přičemž zvíře změní podobu a stává se masným produktem, a potom ho může s chutí spokojeně zkonzumovat. Se ženami v románech Atwoodové se zachází podobně. Ženy jsou vnímány jako něco jiného než muž – jako předmět, který muže doplňuje. Atwoodová pomocí jídla a konzumace ukazuje, že role žen ve společnosti jsou vždy podřízené vůli muže – ať už je to role manželky, matky nebo milenky. Jazyk, který Atwoodová používá při popisu žen i zvířat, je také často podobný popisu neživých předmětů, jako kdyby se jejich osobitost úplně vytratila a mohly být lehce manipulovány mužovou vůlí. Ženy také podléhají jakési fragmentaci podle Adamsové: podobně jako maso vyžaduje zabalení do potravinové fólie, ženy z románů se obalují make-upem a sexy oblečením, upozorňují na své přednosti, a stávají se tak jedlými.

Práce se snaží dokázat, že většina žen v románech Margaret Atwoodové je

„konzumována“ společností, ve které žije, aniž by si to uvědomovala. Atwoodová poukazuje na to, že i když si ženy omezení svého postavení uvědomí, společnost je „zkonzumuje“ ať chtějí nebo ne, protože jednotlivec těžko bojuje proti nastavením celé společnosti. Hlavní ženské postavy si v určitém stádiu svou viktimizaci uvědomí, ale kvůli nastaveným společenským normám neprocházejí dalším vývojem. Smyslem jejich života se tak nestane snaha tento koncept změnit tím, že by našly svou vlastní cestu, ale přežití – zůstat naživu v rámci svých možností. Toto tvrzení je rozvedeno pomocí teorie „Základních pozic obětí“, kterou sama Atwoodová prezentovala v *Přežití: tematickém průvodci kanadskou literaturou* (1972).

Abstract

The thesis deals with the early works of the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood – novels *The Edible Woman* (1969) and *Surfacing* (1972). The thesis focuses on victimization and objectification of the female characters through photography and consumption. The two topics are crucial for the two "body" chapters of the thesis. The first chapter deals with Susan Sontag's and Roland Barthes' theory of photography, and applies it to both novels. With the help of a camera, the man takes control over the woman. Similarly to a gun, it is a device with a release one can easily press to overpower its subject and turn it into a trophy – an object in its unalterable position one can manipulate with easily. Therefore, the thesis also explores the parallels between female and animal victims and hunting. Roland Barthes in his *Camera Lucida* (1980) analyses posing in front of the photographer. He is convinced that at the moment of picture taking the person waiting for the pull of the trigger transforms themselves into an object and thus loses their real self – with this version of the portrayed person, the photographer can manipulate according to his will. The gaze of the camera is unscrupulous and predatory; the thesis elaborates on it by the feminist theory of Laura Mulvey, who in her anthology *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989) claims that the camera functions as an extension of the male objectifying gaze.

The second chapter examines consumption. The main argument for this chapter is Carol J. Adams's theory of the "absent referent" she describes in her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990). Margaret Atwood's female characters can be then perceived as meat, which everybody consumes without a direct association to its origin – a living animal. Adams refers to the stages leading to consumption; it is objectification, fragmentation, and the following consumption. In order to consume an animal without difficulty, one first has to see it as something else than a living subject, one has to carve it up second, in the process of which the animal loses its shape and becomes a meat product, at last one can happily devour. The women in Atwood's novels are treated in a similar way. The women are seen as something other than the male – as an object that supplements the man. Using the symbolism of food and consumption, Atwood demonstrates that the role of women in the society is always subjected to the will of men – be it the role of a wife, a mother or a lover. The language Atwood uses to describe women and animals is often similar to the description of inanimate objects – as if they were deprived of their existence as subjects and could be manipulated easily by the man's will. The women also meet the ideology of Adams's fragmentation: similarly to meat that tends to be wrapped in cellophane, the women from the

novels “wrap” themselves into make-up and sexy outfits, draw attention to their attractive body parts, and thus become edible.

The thesis attempts to demonstrate that the majority of women in Margaret Atwood’s novels are “consumed” by the society they live in without realising it. Atwood implies that even if the women realise their position, the society “consumes” them whether it is with or against their will, because the individual can hardly change the system of the whole society. The female protagonists do realise their victimization in the course of the novels, but they do not evolve or change because of the set social norms. The meaning of their lives is thus not the attempt to find their own way, but survival – staying alive within the limits of their opportunities. This argument is supported by Atwood’s own theory of the “Basic Animal Victims” that she presented in her *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972).

Contents

We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
back to this scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.[1]

Introduction

Margaret Atwood was born 1939 in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. She is an acclaimed poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, and environmental activist. *The Edible Woman* (1969) and *Surfacing* (1972) are Margaret Atwood's two earliest novels. The two novels are of very different nature; *The Edible Woman* can be read as ironical and humorous, and *Surfacing* as much more serious, as it discusses the themes of death and abortion. Nevertheless, both novels deal with the objectification and victimization of women, which I decided to focus on in my thesis. Among my other primary sources are poems by Margaret Atwood, Adrienne Rich and Sharon Olds.

The early writing of Margaret Atwood can be considered both typically Canadian and proto-feminist. In her *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Atwood explains that Canadian literature dealing with the violence against animals is often written from the point of view of an animal victim. Her own novels share a similar principle of the portrayal of the victims. However, Atwood adds another dimension to her novels; the victims of her novels are women, too. The novels are written from the perspective of the female protagonists who are sympathetic towards the tortured or hunted animals and realize that their position within the society and role in the relationships between men and women are strikingly similar to the animal victims.

Atwood explicitly links women and animals by using strategic language and thematic parallels; I am going to explore these in the following chapters of my thesis. The language she uses to describe both women and animals is often depersonalized, as if they were not present and could be easily manipulated like an object according to the male will. The animals and women are thematically linked by consumption and photography, which are the two core themes of my

[1] Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck," *Modern Women Poets*, ed. Deryn Rees – Jones (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2005) [henceforth "Rich"] p. 143.

thesis. The male characters are seen as “hunters” and “consumers” of the animals and women involved. Firstly, there is the camera and its predatory male gaze. Margaret Atwood claims her novels are “proto-feminist”; *The Edible Woman* was published “four years after it was written and just in time to coincide with the rise of feminism in North America”[2]. Margaret Atwood explains why it was not a product of the movement: “there was no women's movement when I was composing the book in 1965, and I'm not gifted with clairvoyance, though like many at the time I'd read Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir behind locked doors.”[3] Nevertheless, there are similarities with the feminist theory, particularly with Laura Mulvey’s theory of a man being the bearer of the look and a woman being the object that is being looked at, which she explores in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1989). Through the camera, the male characters gain control of the women. Similarly to a gun, it is a device with a release one can easily press to overpower its subject and turn it into a trophy – an object in its unalterable position one can manipulate easily. Just like a gun that can shoot an animal dead, the camera “kills” something in the women: it violates their privacy, freedom and pride. The camera is also an extension of the male gaze. I will also focus on the idea that photography can manipulate reality. For instance, the protagonists try to learn about their identity with the help of looking at a photo album. They fail, however, and reject the images of themselves as they were manipulated by the photographer. I am going to compare Margaret Atwood’s views on photography especially with those of Susan Sontag’s in *On Photography* (London: Penguin Classics, 2002) and Roland Barthes’ in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1984). *The Photography Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003) has been also very helpful in my research.

Secondly, the women are “consumed” by the society without realising it, similarly to meat that is consumed by everyone without the explicit link to its origin – a living animal. In both *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing*, Margaret Atwood uses two main strategies to argue that the protagonist of the novel is passive and oppressed. She deals with violence against animals and with the consumption of meat, and she uses food and vegetables that imply inanimity and passivity, and, therefore, the notion that women are treated as material objects. The protagonists

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[2] Margaret Atwood, “Introduction,” *The Edible Woman* (London: Virago Press, 2009) [henceforth “Introduction”] p. X.

[3] “Introduction,” p. X.

become aware of their oppression and their passivity as an answer to it, and try to find their true selves. Dealing with food and consumption, Atwood draws attention to the roles of women in society, especially to those of a wife, a mother, a mistress – which are always someone subjected to the will of a man. She also points out the fact that women are used to being "consumed," and although they realise how limited their roles are, they cannot get out of this concept so easily. The most helpful secondary source for this theme, and for the second chapter, was Carol J. Adams's *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2010).

Margaret Atwood plays with the concept of the hunter and the hunted, and the consumer and the consumed. Her female characters cannot become subjects, as the society does not allow it. The only way how they can gain power is by taking advantage of their objectification; for example, they can paradoxically become hunters of men by presenting themselves as beautiful objects to them. Nevertheless, their true identity is suppressed. A natural woman becomes an idea that can no longer exist in real life. The aim of my thesis is to demonstrate the ways Atwood uses to show the parallels between the animals and women and prove that although the female protagonists are aware of being victimized and objectified, their roles are rigidly determined by the society. The protagonists' effort to change the concept by finding their own way is likely to fail. What sadly becomes the meaning of their lives is survival – staying alive within the limits of their possibilities. In *Survival,* Margaret Atwood argues that in oppressed society a woman can never free herself from the victimization and become a "creative non-victim"[4]. In order to make "creative activity of of all kinds […] possible"[5], "the external and/or internal causes of victimization [have to be] removed"[6]. The victims may deny the fact that they are a victim "for fear of losing the privileges they possess"[7], they can resignedly explain their victimization by "an act of Fate, the Will of God, dictates of Biology […], the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the Unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea"[8] – or "become locked

[4] Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Limited, 1972) [henceforth "*Survival*"] p. 38.
[5] *Survival*, p. 38.
[6] *Survival*, p. 38.
[7] *Survival*, p. 36.
[8] *Survival*, p. 37.

into [their] anger and fail to change [their] situation"[9]. Atwood thus deliberately underrates the power of the individual to take control of their own life.

[9] *Survival*, p. 38.

1. THE OBJECTIFYING AND VICTIMIZING CAMERA

1.1 The Object and the Subject

In my thesis, I am going to use the notions "subject" and "object". Ellen Peel in her "Subject, Object, and the Alternation of First- and Third-Person Narration in Novels by Alther, Atwood, and Drabble: Toward a Theory of a Feminist Aesthetics"[10] explores the parallels between the narration and the way the protagonists see themselves, and argues that the society forces women to see themselves as objects. In *The Edible Woman*, Margaret Atwood uses "alternating narration", where the novel "shift[s] sharply between first-person narration by the protagonist and third-person narration about the protagonist"[11], in order to question the women's role as both subject and object. Peel argues that the alternation is caused by the female protagonists' "uneasy view of themselves as both subject and object, both self and other."[12] Peel suggests that "A woman may consider herself a subject but face strong pressure from society that urges her to see herself as object, as other".[13] Such argument is based on the theory of Simone de Beauvoir:

> [a woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other.[14]

Peel is convinced that patriarchy is responsible for the women's alienation from themselves; patriarchal society "encourages a woman to see herself as an object and to relinquish her voice to a masculine subject"[15]. A woman living in a patriarchal society thus cannot see herself as an equal subject. The alternating narration of *The Edible Woman* is, however, capable of capturing the

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[10] Ellen Peel, "Subject, Object, and the Alternation of First- and Third-Person Narration in Novels by Alther, Atwood, and Drabble: Toward a Theory of a Feminist Aesthetics," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 30.2 (1989): 107-122, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCO, Web. 5 May 2011. [henceforth "Peel"]

[11] Peel, p. 108.

[12] Peel, p. 108.

[13] Peel, p. 118.

[14] Peel, p. 119.

[15] Peel, p. 119.

struggle of identity. The sharp contrast between the perspective of an object, “she”, and the perspective of a subject, “I”, implies there is no such thing as a female subject equivalent to the male one; the “I” cannot exist without its relation to the male subject. Peel believes that “[f]irst-person point of view presents the protagonist as subject (at least of narration); third-person narration presents her as object (at least of narration); and sharp alternation between the two vividly presents her unease.”[16] The protagonist may change her role as an object or a subject in the narration, but she may not change her role in the society that has defined it for her. In the next sections of this chapter and in the second chapter, I am going to demonstrate that even though the protagonists of *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* think they may function as subjects, patriarchal society does not allow them to. The protagonists are “hunted” by the “male gaze” of the camera and “consumed” by the male characters who treat them as human beings that have, unlike men, been deprived of their subject identity. They, nevertheless, realise their position as objects and victims of the patriarchal society, and revolt.

1.2 The Camera as a Weapon

Margaret Atwood is very sceptical towards photography; the camera can be seen as a weapon turning the subject into an object, and as an instrument of manipulation. Margaret Atwood’s poem “This Is a Photograph of Me”, published 1966, and a fictional essay “No More Photos” that was published in the collection called *The Tent*, four decades later, introduce Margaret Atwood’s attitude towards photography. I believe it is important to present the whole poem:

This Is a Photograph of Me

It was taken some time ago.
At first it seems to be
a smeared
print: blurred lines and grey flecks

[16] Peel, p. 108.

blended with the paper;

then, as you scan
it, you can see something in the left-hand corner
a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree
(balsam or spruce) emerging
and, to the right, halfway up
what ought to be a gentle
slope, a small frame house.

In the background there is a lake,
and beyond that, some low hills.

(The photograph was taken
the day after I drowned.

I am in the lake, in the center
of the picture, just under the surface.

It is difficult to say where
precisely, or to say
how large or how small I am:
the effect of water
on light is a distortion.

but if you look long enough
eventually
you will be able to see me.)[17]

[17] Margaret Atwood, "This Is a Photograph of Me," *Selected Poems: 1965-1975* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1987) p. 8.

The poem can be divided into two parts; the first part describes what you would focus on while viewing the photograph. The second part reveals the hidden body. Its position to the whole picture is inferior. The fact that this part is in brackets emphasizes its irrelevance; yet it is more important because it refers back to the title. The drowned woman is there; she can be overlooked but her existence cannot by denied. The poem shows that photography can manipulate truth, it is only a version of reality, mediated by the photographer, who presents his perspective only.

In "No More Photos"[18], Atwood explores another aspect of photography. Even if the woman is present and fully visible in the photograph, it is, again, only the idea of her that is mediated by the photographer and presented to the viewer. Atwood also points out the material aspect of photography; a photograph is made of paper or plastic which deprives the subject of the photograph of its three-dimensionality and, more importantly, of its life: it can be possessed by somebody else. Susan Sontag believes "to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed."[19]

Atwood touches upon the aggressive act of photography; the photographer has an absolute power to capture the woman in any position and can deprive the woman of her secrets and privacy. The camera objectifies; the woman is transformed into an image:

> No more photos. Surely there are enough. No more shadows of myself thrown by light onto pieces of paper, onto squares of plastic. No more of my eyes, mouths, noses, moods, bad angles. No more yawns, teeth, wrinkles. I suffer from my own multiplicity. Two or three images would have been enough, or four, or five. That would have allowed for a firm idea: *This is she*. As it is, I'm watery, I ripple, from moment to moment I dissolve into my other selves. Turn the page: you, looking, are newly confused. You know me too well to know me. Or not too well: too much.[20]

Susan Sontag claims that the photograph is "a potent means of gaining control over [the subject]"[21]. It is a predatory act that violates its subjects. According to Sontag,

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[18] Margaret Atwood, "No More Photos," *The Tent* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006) p. 25.
[19] Sontag, p. 4.
[20] Margaret Atwood, "No More Photos," *The Tent* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006) p. 25.
[21] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Classics, 2002) [henceforth "Sontag"] p.155.

> […] To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder – a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time.[22]

Photography can be very insensitive to unrepresentative positions and, for example, ageing. Atwood shares Susan Sontag's idea that photography has "knowledge of them that they can never have"[23]. Margaret Atwood ultimately sees this as a violation of its subject. Moreover, I believe that Atwood's message is that the camera can never reveal the real self, but it is capable of producing endless images that shape the way people perceive the depicted person. According to Diane Arbus, "the more [a photograph] tells you the less you know."[24] The photographer puts himself into "a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, power"[25], but it is only the photographer's perspective – his version of reality – that does not correspond to reality itself. As a result, the real identity is violated, transformed and manipulated by the photographer into its objectified version.

Nevertheless, Atwood limits her view of photography to a specific subject-matter, and, moreover, to a specific kind of photographer, who determines both the style and the use of photography. The photographs she describes are either group photographs that require posing and depict idealized reality, or photographs that serve as a metaphor of male control over the woman. Furthermore, Margaret Atwood shows that a photographer can take possession of anything; nature, an animal or a person. In *Surfacing*, David decides to take shots for his movie called "*Random Samples*": "He wants to get shots of things they come across, random samples he calls them[26]". It is his way of gaining control over the place, northern Quebec, its wildlife, as well as his wife and the unnamed protagonist of the novel. It is his way of "colonising" all these subjects. Atwood blends such "colonising" with stereotypical masculinity. For example, David wants to

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[22] Sontag, p. 14.
[23] Sontag, p. 14.
[24] Sontag, p. 111.
[25] Sontag, p. 4.
[26] Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (London: Virago Press, 1999) [henceforth "*Surfacing*"] p.4.

have a shot of him taken while he is carrying a log:

> In the end they struck the axe in the log, after several tries, and took turns shooting each other standing beside it, arms folded and one foot on it as if it was a lion or a rhinoceros.[27]

The camera offers a record of his superiority, his masculine pose suggests his overmastering of the "colonised" setting, his "victory". Similarly, David wants to take a shot of a killed, mutilated heron (that is later in the novel revalued not only as a symbol of the destruction of wildlife but also as a symbol of innocence and of the protagonist's aborted child) and wants Joe, the protagonist's boyfriend, to get involved:

> "[...] we can put it next to the fish guts."
> "Shit," Joe said, "it really stinks."
> "That won't show in the movie," David said, "you can stand in for five minutes, it looks so great, you have to admit."[28]

He wants to overcome the smell of its dead body for the sake of a "great" movie and wants to organise the composition of death – a heron and fish guts. His statement that the smell "won't show" suggests that as a shooter he is capable of transforming reality, of presenting the image according to his will. David also wants to take shots of his wife, Anna. He forces her to take off her clothes and claims his husband rights to do so. When she tries to refuse, he violates her and humiliates her, while being convinced that she is actually enjoying the role of a woman that is being looked at: "'It's token resistance,' David said, 'she wants to, she's an exhibitionist at heart. She likes her lush bod, don't you? Even if she is getting too fat.'[29]" David humiliates Anna in a striking way: "'You'll go in beside the dead bird, it's your chance for stardom, you've always wanted fame...'"[30] His statement suggests that she is going to become an overmastered object in a

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[27] *Surfacing*, p. 75.
[28] *Surfacing*, p. 110.
[29] *Surfacing*, p. 129.
[30] *Surfacing*, p. 128.

shot that can be placed right beside another prostrated object, a dead bird. The narrator describes the principle of "*Random Samples*": "they're going to look at what they collected and rearrange it"[31]. In the same way, one can organise photographs in an album. It is within the power of the photographer (as well as the shooter) to take possession of his subjects, transform them into objects and subject them to his will. In both novels, Atwood compares the camera to a weapon:

> "Shoot," David said to Joe, and to Anna, "I'll count to ten." Joe swivelled the camera and trained it on them like a bazooka or a strange instrument of torture and pressed the button, lever, sinister whirr.[32]

The photographic language itself uses terms that draw the parallel between the camera and the weapon. Jan Avgikos claims that "The implicit aggression of the photographic art – *aiming* the camera, *shooting* the picture – is literalized when the image examines the female body."[33] Anna is then seen only as an object, as a female body, not as an equal person to the male viewer who is in control of her. Indeed, Anna is not perceived as equal: "she just doesn't happen to be equal and that's not my fault, is it? What I married was a pair of boobs.[34]" The image of her is objectified and sexualized. According to Sontag, "Reality as such is redefined – as an item for exhibition, as a record for scrutiny, as a target for surveillance"[35]. Anna becomes a target of David's oppression and control, just like the dead heron.

Similarly, Marian's fiancé, Peter, used to go hunting and took pictures of his victims:

> "[...] there was blood and guts all over the place. All over me, what a mess, rabbit guts dangling from the trees, god the trees were red for yards..." [...]
> "God it was funny. Lucky thing Trigger and me had the old cameras along, we got some good shots of the whole mess [...]."[36]

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31 *Surfacing*, p. 4.
32 *Surfacing*, p. 129-130.
33 Jan Avgikos, "Cindy Sherman: Burning Down the House", *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003) [henceforth "*The Photography Reader*"] p. 339.
34 *Surfacing*, p. 132.
35 Sontag, p. 156.
36 Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (London: Virago Press, 2009) [henceforth "*The Edible Woman*"] p. 80.

Marian is disgusted and imagines the scene as a photograph:

> [...] my mind withdrew, concentrating instead on the picture of the scene in the forest. I saw it as though it was a slide projected on a screen in a dark room, the colours luminous, green, brown, blue for the sky, red. Peter stood with his back to me in a plaid shirt, his rifle slung on his shoulder. A group of friends, those friends whom I had never met, were gathered around him, their faces clearly visible in the sunlight that fell in shafts down through the anonymous trees, splashed with blood, the mouths wrenched with laughter. I couldn't see the rabbit.[37]

The victim, a rabbit, is not seen because it is no longer important. What is important is their overmastering of an innocent being which is emphasised by the laughter upon its violent humiliation, making them sure of their victory. According to Sontag, the camera may "presume, intrude, trespass, distort, exploit, and, at the farthest reach of metaphor, assassinate – all activities that […] can be conducted from a distance, and with some detachment."[38] The rabbit becomes absent from the picture, but also from its own animal existence; it is dead and, therefore, transformed into an object. One can feel much bigger detachment to an object than a subject, and the camera enables the photographer to detach himself even further as it is placed between him and the object that is being photographed.

Atwood draws a clear parallel between the camera and a weapon by placing Peter's weapons next to his camera. She suggests its similar aggressive power:

> To one side of the bookcase is a pegboard with hooks that holds Peter's collection of weapons: two rifles, a pistol, and several wicked-looking knives. [...] Peter's cameras hang there too, their glass eyes covered by leather cases.[39]

In the same way, Marian becomes a hunted "target" of her fiancé, Peter: "[...] there was another

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37 *The Edible Woman*, p. 80.
38 Sontag, p. 13.
39 *The Edible Woman*, p. 67.

flash of light, and the sound of Peter laughing. She should never have worn red. It made her a perfect target[40]". Peter is described as a hunter, a predator and a murderer:

> That dark intent marksman with his aiming eye had been there all the time, hidden by the other layers, waiting for her at the dead centre: a homicidal maniac with a lethal weapon in his hands.[41]

She comes to a party with a new haircut wearing a short red dress, eccentric earrings and heavy make-up. She wants to please Peter and awaken her femininity, which he said she was rejecting. She realises, however, that she does not feel to be herself, being such an artificial "masquerade"[42]. Despite her feelings, Peter does appreciate her new look though and wants to take possession of it by taking a picture of her:

> "Could you just stand over there by the guns and lean back a little against the wall?" [...] "Now," he said. "Could you stand a little less stiffly? Relax. And don't hunch your shoulders together like that, come on, stick out your chest, and don't look so worried darling, look natural, come on, *smile*..."[43]

Sontag points out one of the common beliefs about photography: "To take a good photograph, […] one must already see it. That is the image must exist in the photographer's mind at or before the moment when the negative is exposed."[44] Peter clearly has an image of a perfect fiancée in his mind. According to Sontag, "photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects"[45]. The image of Marian in Peter's mind is idealized; her posing and smiling is supposed to show Marian at her best – as a sexual object who is subjugated to his will. And she indeed is:

> He put one arm around her waist. With the other hand he half-undid the zipper of her

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40 *The Edible Woman*, p. 307.
41 *The Edible Woman*, p. 308-309.
42 *The Edible Woman*, p. 301.
43 *The Edible Woman*, p. 291.
44 Sontag, p. 117.
45 Sontag, p. 6.

> dress; then he did it back up again. […]
> "Too bad we don't have time to hop into bed," he said, "but I wouldn't want to get you all mussed up. Oh well, plenty of time for that later."[46]

Marian is obviously not allowed to be presented as a "mussed up" fiancée at his party. Peter prefers to both present and love the image she transformed herself into: "I'm going to marry you, aren't I?" says Peter and adds: "And I love you especially in that red dress. You should wear red more often."[47] By refusing to take a picture of her as she is – stiff, he is revealing not only his views on picture-taking, but also his attitude towards women. If photographs are "miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire"[48], as Sontag puts it, then what Peter desires is to have a miniature of what he really wants: a smiling woman in a sexy red dress, whose posing invites the male gaze. Nevertheless, that is something Marian cannot truly become.

Marian does not enjoy posing; she feels uneasy and anxious when being photographed. Roland Barthes in his *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* analyses posing; he is not able to "relax" while having his picture taken: "I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image."[49] However, Barthes is aware of the inauthenticity of such an image, which it is caused by splitting his identity when photographed: "In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself"[50]. As a result, the notion of "'myself' never coincides with my image; for it is the image which is heavy, motionless, stubborn (which is why society sustains it), and 'myself' which is light, divided, dispersed; like a bottle-imp, 'myself' doesn't hold still, giggling in my jar"[51]. His concern is that "Photography transformed subject into object"[52]: "I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a

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[46] *The Edible Woman*, p. 289.
[47] *The Edible Woman*, p. 290.
[48] Sontag, p. 4.
[49] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1984) [henceforth "Barthes"] p. 10.
[50] Barthes, p. 13.
[51] Barthes, p. 12.
[52] Barthes, p. 13.

micro-version of death [...]”[53]. When posing, Barthes is simply not himself; he performs many versions of himself at the same time. Photography further deprives him of his core identity by literally transforming him into an object – a photograph:

> when I discover myself in the product of this operation, what I see is that I have become Total-Image, which is to say, Death in person; others – the Other – do not dispossess me of myself, they turn me, ferociously, into an object, they put me at their mercy, at their disposal, classified in a file, ready for the subtlest deceptions[54]

He claims it is his “*political* right to be a subject which [he] must protect”[55].

Marian experiences a similar “micro-version of death” when photographed; her body becomes paralysed because she is aware of the process of objectification:

> Her body had frozen, gone rigid. She couldn’t move, she couldn’t even move the muscles of her face as she stood and stared into the round glass lens pointing towards her, she wanted to tell him not to touch the shutter-release but she couldn’t move...[56]

Peter’s camera is a means of power and Marian metaphorically feels attacked and unable to protest because as a woman she is inferior. Such paralysis, however, is subconscious. Unlike Barthes, she is not aware of the reasons why she feels uncomfortable when posing. It is her pure instinct to stop the metaphorical process of being turned into an object in a photograph: “'What’s the matter with me?' [Marian] said to herself, 'It’s only a camera.'”[57] The fact is that it is not only a camera, it is the whole concept of femininity versus masculinity, and objectification of women she feels anxious about. Marian is paralysed when being photographed because she feels she is turning into an object, and realises she has to protect her “political right” and not become one.

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[53] Barthes, p. 14.
[54] Barthes, p.
[55] Barthes, p. 15.
[56] *The Edible Woman*, p. 291.
[57] *The Edible Woman*, p. 291.

1.3 The Male Gaze

According to Laura Mulvey, women tend to be objectified by the male gaze; Mulvey speaks of the active instinct that exists as "the erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object"[58] She perceives a "Woman as image, man as bearer of the look"[59], similarly to Williams, who considers "Man the active subject of the look, the looker, woman its passive object"[60]. Such division implies traditional passivity of women and activity of men; "the woman [is] as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look"[61]. The oppression of women within patriarchal culture and their passivity is "socially, psychologically and culturally constructed"[62], as well as is the sexual difference itself. Berger's statement speaks of the sexual difference but also suggests women's passive reconciliation with such a concept: "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves"[63].

Photography is an opportunity for voyeurism and fetishism. According to Roberta McGrath, "To take a photograph is to exercise an illusory control, a mastery which is characteristic of voyeurism"[64]. In *The Edible Woman*, Peter can enjoy the gaze at any woman at his own engagement party; his camera does allow it:

> He was standing with a camera in his hand grinning boyishly, though somewhat foolishly, down at her. [...] But how touching of her to try instead for Peter; pathetic, actually. After all Peter was off the market almost as definitely as if he was already married.
>
> Marian smiled to herself and retreated, but not before Peter had spotted her and called, waving the camera, his face guiltily over-cheerful. "Hi honey, the party's

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58 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema," *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1989) [henceforth "*Visual and Other Pleasures*"] p. 17.
59 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema," *Visual and Other Pleasures* p. 19.
60 Liz Wells, "The Photographic Gaze," *The Photography Reader* p. 325.
61 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema,",*Visual and Other Pleasures* p. 21.
62 Roberta McGrath, "Re-reading Edward Weston: Feminism, Photography and Psychoanalysis," *The Photography Reader* p. 328.
63 Liz Wells, "The Photographic Gaze," *The Photography Reader* p.324.
64 Roberta McGrath, "Re-reading Edward Weston: Feminism, Photography and Psychoanalysis," *The Photography Reader* [henceforth "McGrath"] p. 330.

> really going! Almost picture-time!" Lucy turned her head towards the doorway, smiling, her eyelids raising themselves like window shades.[65]

Apparently, Lucy is aware of his male gaze; her power comes from being objectified. However, it is the photographer that turns out to be the winner. In terms of fetishism, photographs "come to stand in for the missing object"[66] which can be possessed by the photographer and, therefore, portable and "referred to at will"[67].

The gaze of the camera is phallic. McGrath draws parallels between a camera with its male gaze, and a penis, as a "photograph is a penetration of the space of the other"[68]. The voyeuristic and fetishist needs come from a Freudian concept of the castration threat imposed by women. "Subjecting women to a controlling and unreturned gaze" through voyeurism, and displacing or substituting "the anxiety onto a re-assuring object which comes to stand in for the missing penis"[69] through fetishism, help men to gain control over the situation and implied danger. Women experience a lack of control as they "are expected to remain on the other side of the lens"[70]. According to Sontag, the camera transforms the photographer into an active voyeur: "only he has mastered the situation"[71]. The camera then becomes a violent means of male control, having one more abusive realm – "in [a photograph] nothing can be refused or transformed [...]"[72]. Unlike Lucy, Marian is aware of the violent and intransigent use of the camera and does not want to become a hunted victim:

> She could not let him catch her this time. Once he pulled the trigger she would be stopped, fixed indissolubly in that gesture, that single stance, unable to move or change.[73]

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65 *The Edible Woman*, p. 299.
66 McGrath, p. 333.
67 McGrath, p. 331.
68 McGrath, p. 330.
69 McGrath, p. 332.
70 Nathalie Cooke, *Margaret Atwood: A Critical Companion* (London: Greenwood Press, 2004) p. 54.
71 Sontag, p. 10.
72 Barthes, p. 91.
73 *The Edible Woman*, p. 308.

Sontag points out that "primitive people"[74] – the conquered native cultures that also had to face being dominated by the daguerrotype, the first successful 19th century photographic process – considered taking pictures a violent gesture and believed that a photographer can steal the spirit of their subject and, therefore, didn't want to be photographed[75]: "the camera was yet another weapon in the wars of domination"[76]. Sontag claims that people nowadays "fear the camera's disapproval [because they] want the idealized image: a photograph of themselves looking their best"[77]. Such a concept is again culturally and socially constructed; people "seek to have their photographs taken – feel that they are images, and are made real by photographs[78]." Barthes considers taking pictures "a new social value" with its "publicity of the private"[79]. People want to become images, they want to be objectified. Marian, however, wants to stay a subject. As a result, she rejects her femininity as Peter implies; she does not want to be a passive victim of the objectifying male gaze. Marian is manipulated into getting a new flashy haircut and a sexy red dress by her fiancé, Peter. Her uneasiness with her artificial look suggests that she is becoming aware of these relations. For a moment, she becomes a "masquerade"[80], an object that responds to the idea of woman of her time – an image. Marian is disgusted by the women who "watch themselves being looked at", who are, for example, the "office virgins" she works with. She satirically describes them as "artificial blondes"[81] she can never relate to. They are obsessed with checking their make-up in their compact mirrors. The unnamed protagonist of *Surfacing* looks at magazine pictures of women and women who copy them with a similar unease:

> [...] a seamed and folded imitation of a magazine picture that is itself an imitation of a woman who is also an imitation, the original nowhere, [...] her face twists into poses of exultation and total abandonment, that is all.[82]

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74 Sontag, p. 158.
75 based on Sontag, p. 158-161.
76 Lucy R. Lippard, "Doubletake: The Diary of a Relationship with an Image," *The Photography Reader* p. 347.
77 Sontag, p. 85.
78 Sontag, p. 161.
79 Barthes, p. 98.
80 *The Edible Woman*, p. 301.
81 *The Edible Woman*, p. 16.
82 *Surfacing*, p. 159.

She is disgusted by their artificiality but, above all, by their passive subjection to a male gaze. Her friend, Anna, is described as being behind her "facade of makeup[83], a facade she imprisoned herself into. The protagonist realises that "her artificial face is the natural one"[84]. Anna reveals her own imprisonment by saying: "'He doesn't like to see me without it,' and then, contradicting herself, 'He doesn't know I wear it.'"[85] When she forgets to put on her make-up later, she is afraid that "he'll kill [her]" because she broke one of his "little set of rules" and is afraid of being punished[86]. I would argue the "little set" has been actually created by her; Anna made the rules herself, based on what she imagines her husband desires her to be. Laura Mulvey speaks of the artificiality of women being deeply rooted in their own concept of themselves:

> The female body has become industrialized; a woman must buy the means to paint on (make-up) and sculpt (underwear/clothes) a look of femininity, a look which is the guarantee of *visibility* in sexist society for each individual woman. [...] Magazines provide the know-how, techniques and expertise; sealing the association of *woman* and *sexuality* in the minds of women themselves. It is almost as though woman herself was a factory, feeding in the means of production, painting on the mask and emerging transformed with value added in the process, a commodity ready for consumption.[87]

Feuerbach's statement that "our era prefers the image to the thing, the copy to the original, the representation to the reality, appearance to being"[88] is also valid. Such preference has a strong influence on what men expect of women, and how women perceive themselves being aware of what is expected from them. Therefore, most of the women want the photograph taken of them to be idealised and perfect. Their posing is sexualized by the women themselves. Although Atwood clearly implies that the camera gaze is voyeuristic and male, as well as simplifying and limiting, it is not only the camera gaze both protagonists should run away from. Nevertheless, the camera

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83 *Surfacing*, p. 127.
84 *Surfacing*, p. 37.
85 *Surfacing*, p. 38.
86 *Surfacing*, p. 116.
87 Laura Mulvey, "J. L. Godard: Images of Women and Sexuality," *Visual and Other Pleasures* p. 54.
88 Sontag, p. 153.

enables patriarchy. According to Sontag, "philosophers since Plato have tried to loosen our dependence on images by evoking the standard of an image – free way of apprehending the real."[89] Patriarchal society, however, does not demand the real, but the idea of a woman that is, and photographs have helped to fix such idea. Sontag claims that photographs "have become the norm for the way things appear to us, thereby changing the very idea of reality"[90]. As a result,

> The powers of photography have in effect de-Platonized our understanding of reality, making it less and less plausible to reflect upon our experience according to the distinction between images and things, between copies and originals.[91]

The protagonists of the two novels are trying to escape the patriarchal image of themselves imposed on their heads. The protagonist of *Surfacing* implies such awareness: "Anna's soul closed in the gold compact, that and not the camera is what I should have broken."[92] It is the whole concept of objectification of women and mainly the way women perceive themselves that they try to escape from. Both protagonists need to revalue the situations they are in and free themselves from fragmentation and limitation that is imposed on them by the men. Their protest is, however, either subconscious or rather passive. Marian develops anorexia nervosa and is not able to eat, her body protests without her mind being involved. Only later she realises that she is trapped by social conventions and by Peter, and offers him a decorated doll cake substitute of her artificial self. Peter wants the artificial side of her she once presented to him at the party. At the party, "She sensed her face as vastly spreading and papery and slightly dilapidated: a huge billboard smile, peeling away in flaps and patches, the metal surface beneath showing through..."[93] Marian then comes to self-discovery and reveals her plain, "metal surface". The protagonist of *Surfacing* dumps the camera as a protest, but by conceiving a child with Joe in order to finally cope with her abortion she does not really free herself from the male control. The ending of both novels is ambiguous in terms of victory and defeat. It is very hard for both protagonists to gain total independence because their passive submissive role is deeply rooted not

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89 Sontag, p. 153.
90 Sontag, p. 87.
91 Sontag, p. 179.
92 *Surfacing*, p. 169.
93 *The Edible Woman*, p. 306.

only in the society and culture but also in their own minds. They are subjected to the violence of the camera and the male gaze even if they are aware of them. In *The Edible Woman*, similarly, Marian is aware of advertisement strategies because it is her job, however, "just because she knew what they were up to didn't mean she was immune"[94]. The camera can manipulate memory, and objectify women and take possession of them. It is a powerful means of male control one cannot escape from so easily.

1.4 Photography as a Means of Fixing a Version of Reality

Considering family albums and picture taking, historically, "men may have been the principal picture takers, but in general women have been the keepers of the family album, [...]"[95] Marian would not probably be interested in organising the photographs though – organisation and order are Peter's interests:

> "Thought I'd get some pictures of the party, just for the record," he said. "They'll be fun to have later, to look back on. This is our first real party together, you know; quite an occasion. By the way, have you got a photographer for the wedding yet?"
> "I don't know," she said, "I think they have."
> "I'd like to do it myself, but of course that's impossible," he said with a laugh.[96]

To take a record of the party is his way of dominating the whole situation, something he would like to do at his own wedding. It also shows a common obsession of taking pictures of some important key events, "particular highlights of family history"[97] like parties, weddings or birth or holidays – positive events. During such events, "Social conventions dictate that people group together, pose and smile when photographed"[98]. Family albums also stand as a confirmation of family history, a proof of existence. The protagonist of *Surfacing* was forced by her lover to have an abortion: "[...] he showed me snapshots of his wife and children, his reasons, his stuffed and

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94 *The Edible Woman*, p. 213.
95 Liz Wells, "Image and Identity," *The Photography Reader* p.376.
96 *The Edible Woman*, p. 290.
97 Liz Wells, "Image and Identity," *The Photography Reader* p. 378.
98 Liz Wells, "Image and Identity," *The Photography Reader* p. 378.

mounted family, they had names, he said I should be mature[99]". There is no need for any other explanation, the snapshots serves as the only explanation he needs to provide. Margaret Atwood's style suggests that his actual family is absent from the situation and his decision about the abortion. However, the snapshots become a relevant excuse. Moreover, his snapshot serve as an example of a possession; the images can be moved, looked at and shown any time for any purpose. The fact that his family is "stuffed", similarly to any animal's head on the wall, implies his wife and his children can be seen as a trophy that was captured by the hunter.

To take pictures of an event is also a way how to take possession of the past. Nevertheless, there is a necessary revaluation involved in looking at the photographs. One's perception of photographs changes according to one's self-development. "Personal memory and photography is inextricably intertwined."[100] There is, however, a difference between a direct memory and the one that is reconstructed while looking at a photograph of an event. Marcel Proust believes that photographs are "not so much an instrument of memory as an invention of it or a replacement."[101] The protagonist of *Surfacing* needs to revalue her past. After her abortion, she made up a fake story to overcome her sense of guilt. She does not speak of an abortion, but of a divorce and of leaving her child. Atwood uses a simile of her made-up identity to an album: "A faked album, the memories fraudulent as passports; but a paper house was better than none and I could almost live in it, I'd lived in it until now[102]". In order to find her true self, she needs to deal with her past and arouse her true memories. Photographs can be thus perceived as evidence of fragmented reality only. In a similar way, the drunk Marian has a vision of herself in the future, shrinked to an object in a photograph:

> [...] who was that tiny two-dimensional small figure in a red dress, posed like a paper woman in a mail-order catalogue, turning and smiling, fluttering in the white empty space... This couldn't be it; there had to be something more.[103]

She does not want to be perceived as a dull artificial woman – never capable of transforming, as

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[99] *Surfacing*, p. 143.
[100] Liz Wells, "Image and Identity," *The Photography Reader* p. 376.
[101] Sontag, p. 165.
[102] *Surfacing*, p. 138.
[103] *The Edible Woman*, p. 306.

the camera imprisoned her in the cage of her red dress. She does not want to be organised with other “objects” into a family album by someone who can gain control of her.

Photographs limit their subjects by fragmenting reality, and violate them through objectification. The protagonist of *Surfacing* decides to destroy the fragmented records:

> [...] the invisible captured images are swimming away into the lake like tadpoles, Joe and David beside their defeated log, axemen, arms folded, Anna with no clothes on jumping off the end of the dock, finger up, hundreds of tiny Annas no longer bottled and shelved.[104]

To show the limitation, Margaret Atwood uses fragmented language. The words such as “defeated log”, “axemen”, “arms folded”, and “Anna with no clothes on” stand for the stereotyped images of the male, patriarchal perspective. Atwood’s language shows that this is what the photographer manipulates you into seeing in his picture. It is his victory that is deprived of any other realm. The same strategy of showing the fragmentation of reality can be found in *The Edible Woman*:

> [Peter] reminded her of the home-movie ads, the father of the family using up rolls and rolls of film on just such everyday ordinary things, what subjects could be better: people laughing, lifting glasses, children at birthday-parties...[105]

In this case, photography is capable of capturing the event as it should be remembered; cheerful and exemplary. The images are sterile, and deprived of any hidden family dramas and problems.

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[104] *Surfacing*, p. 160.
[105] *The Edible Woman*, p. 305.

2. THE CONSUMER AND THE CONSUMED

2.1 The Absent Referent

Atwood uses language that implies an "absent referent"[106], a term that was used by Carol J. Adams in *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. According to Adams, animals are "made absent *as animals* for meat to exist"[107]. The gastronomic language "renames dead bodies before consumers participate in eating them."[108] As a result, the animal "is both there and not there[109]": "Without animals there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food."[110] According to Adams, the absent referent "permits us to forget about the animal as an independent entity; it also enables us to resist efforts to make animals present."[111] Atwood links the protagonists with the violated or consumed animals that are, similarly to the women, "objects of use and possession"[112]. Nevertheless, Adams raises a question that has to be answered in the case of Atwood. She argues that feminists can exploit animals by making them absent in their metaphors; they may "uphold the patriarchal structure of absent referents, appropriating the experience of animals to interpret [their] own violation"[113]. According to Adams,

> Sexual violence and meat eating, which appear to be discrete forms of violence, find a point of intersection in the absent referent. Cultural images of sexual violence, and actual sexual violence, often rely on our knowledge of how animals are butchered and eaten.[114]

Animals may, therefore, become absent referents even in the radical feminist discourse. Adams

[106] Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2010) [henceforth "Adams"] p. 66.
[107] Adams, p. 66.
[108] Adams, p. 66.
[109] Adams, p. 67.
[110] Adams, p. 66.
[111] Adams, p. 66.
[112] Adams p. 171.
[113] Adams, p. 72.
[114] Adams, p. 68.

believes radical feminist discourse "has failed to integrate the *literal* oppression of animals into our analysis of patriarchal culture or to acknowledge the strong historical alliance between feminism and vegetarianism."[115] As a result, "meat's meaning does not refer to itself but to how a woman victimized by male violence felt."[116] I believe Atwood does both; she uses the metaphor of meat and animal victims in order to express the victimization of her female characters. Nevertheless, especially in *Surfacing* Margaret Atwood implies that cruelty to animals is senseless, and links it directly to cruelty to other human beings: "Anything we could do to the animals we could do to each other: we practised on them first."[117] It is questionable to what extent animals and human beings are put on the same level of importance in her texts, but the animals are not always absent from the text *as animals*. In *Surfacing*, for example, the protagonist does not want to kill fish any more and she rescues frog baits. However, although she finds fishing senseless, she forgets that the origin of all meat is the same:

> We didn't need it, our proper food was tin cans. We were committing this act, violation, for sport or amusement or pleasure, recreation they call it, these were no longer the right reasons. That's an explanation but no excuse my father used to say[118]

The tin cans contain meat of animals that are already dead and presented as food. Ironically, if the protagonist stuck to her beliefs, there would be no excuse for eating them either.

2.2 The Consumed Objects

In *The Edible Woman*, Marian's body starts to reject food as a subconscious protest against the role she has been manipulated into; a passive woman that will lose her true self with a marriage proposal. Marian is both afraid of getting married and afraid of signing her obligatory Pension Plan which can be seen as a symbolical parallel of a binding commitment:

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[115] Adams, p. 72.
[116] Adams, p. 67.
[117] *Surfacing*, p. 115.
[118] *Surfacing*, p. 114.

> It wasn't only the feeling of being subject to rules I had no interest in and no part in making [...] It was a kind of superstitious panic about the fact that I had actually signed my name, had put my signature to a magic document which seemed to bind me to a future so far ahead I couldn't think about it.[119]

At first, she tries to adjust to her role of a woman that is inferior to men: "Of course I had to adjust to his moods, but that's true of any man [...]"[120]. Peter, a man she is to marry, is the symbol of control, system, order, decisiveness and rationality. He chooses her because she is "such a sensible girl"[121]. Marian's perception of sensibility is, however, very far from his view: "[...] I see that my actions were really more sensible than I thought at the time. It was my subconscious getting ahead of my conscious self, and the subconscious has its own logic."[122] She feels sensible not while being in control of her actions but actually while losing control; she crawls under a bed searching for protection, later flees from Peter, "surprised to find [her] feet moving, wondering how they had begun"[123], and finally develops anorexia nervosa as her body starts to reject food. It is her subconscious that takes control over her body as a protest. She starts by excluding meat from her diet. The crucial moment occurs when she is eating out with Peter in a restaurant. Peter puts "his own hand on top of hers", an act that can be interpreted in terms of body language as a sign of ownership and control. She feels acutely observed which makes her feel "uneasy"[124]. Peter is the one who decides what they are going to have from the menu because "she never knew what she wanted to have"[125]. And finally, it is through his systematic yet violent preciseness that she realises she is in danger of being "consumed" and gained control of, too:

> She watched the capable hands holding the knife and fork, slicing precisely with an exact adjustment of pressures. How skilfully he did it […] And yet it was a violent

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[119] Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (London: Virago Press, 2009) [henceforth "*The Edible Woman*"] p. 15.
[120] *The Edible Woman*, p. 70.
[121] *The Edible Woman*, p. 106.
[122] *The Edible Woman*, p. 123.
[123] *The Edible Woman*, p. 85.
[124] *The Edible Woman*, p. 183.
[125] *The Edible Woman*, p. 180.

> action, cutting; and violence in connection with Peter seemed incongruous to her.[126]

Marian starts to perceive her steak differently, as "a hunk of muscle", as a "Part of a real cow that once moved and ate and was killed [...]"[127]. She realises how absent the idea of a dead cow is in the "clean, official" product she was being served:

> Of course everyone knew that. But most of the time you never thought about it. In the supermarket they had it all pre-packaged in cellophane, with name-labels and price-labels stuck on it [...][128]

She unsuccessfully tries to find a rational, generally accepted side of it: "'This is ridiculous,' she lectured herself. 'Everyone eats cows, it's natural; you have to eat to stay alive, meat is good for you, it has lots of proteins and minerals.'"[129] Similarly, she tries to find a rational reason why she should marry Peter; he is successful, sensible and able to support her financially. She struggles with her irrational subjective feelings and the rational objective sense of "fulfilment of her social obligation"[130] of a wife and possibly a mother.

Considering the parallels with oppressed animals and women, Marian's rejection of meat can be, therefore, understood symbolically as a rejection of her own feminine body as defined by patriarchy. Indeed, Peter complains that Marian is "rejecting [her] femininity"[131]. However, what she is rejecting is the side of femininity that defines a woman as an object that belongs to a man: a part of his property that is subject to his will and his decisions, that can be manipulated and ordered. According to Carol J Adams, "Women's oppression is expressed through the trope of meat eating"[132]. Adams perceives the theme of vegetarianism as "rejection of male control and violence"[133].

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126 *The Edible Woman*, p. 184.
127 *The Edible Woman*, p. 185.
128 *The Edible Woman*, p. 185.
129 *The Edible Woman*, p. 185.
130 Fiona Tolan, *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2007) [henceforth "Tolan"] p. 13.
131 *The Edible Woman*, p. 95.
132 Adams, p. 171.
133 Adams, p.171.

Marian also stops eating eggs, which can be perceived as a "symbol of reproduction"[134] she is frightened of. She sees her pregnant friend, Clara, as "a swollen mass of flesh with a tiny pinhead, a shape that made her think of a queen-ant".[135] She sees animality in her pregnancy and can only perceive her again as a human being when she is no longer pregnant. After giving birth to her child, she is again "the real Clara, once more in uncontended possession of her own frail body."[136] According to Tolan, "For Marian, there is no mystical power in maternity, which is, instead, a dangerous imposition on the female body."[137] Pregnancy is yet another way in which a man can gain control over a woman and deprive her of her own self. Clara's husband, Joe, is aware of the control he has gained over her and is convinced that "her feminine role demands passivity from her"[138]. Marian's lack of appetite escalates in not being able to eat anything – anorexia nervosa. Similarly to other symptoms of hysteria, anorexia nervosa is "a means by which the body 'speaks' a protest that exists outside of a rational vocabulary"[139]. It is a "simultaneous acceptance and refusal of the organisation of sexuality under patriarchal capitalism"[140]. Marian's mind and body struggle: she wants to be "normal" again, "to adjust", but her subconscious speaks its own language. Peter wants to change her:

> Peter had suggested that she might have something done with her hair. He had also hinted that perhaps she should buy a dress that was, as he put it, "not quite so mousy" as any she already owned, and she had duly bought one. It was short, red, and sequined. She didn't think it was really her, but the saleslady did. "It's you, dear," she had said, her voice positive.[141].

For the occasion of a party, she decided to do as he wants and tries to suppress her true self, replacing it with an artificial one. She goes to the hairdresser's. Margaret Atwood uses medical

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134 Sarah Sceats, "Sharp appetites: Margaret Atwood's consuming politics," *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 97.
135 *The Edible Woman*, p. 139.
136 *The Edible Woman*, p. 139.
137 Tolan, p. 18.
138 *The Edible Woman*, p. 296.
139 Tolan, p. 23.
140 Tolan (quoting Juliet Mitchell's *Woman's Estate*), p. 23.
141 *The Edible Woman*, p. 261.

language to imply the superior relationship of a doctor to a patient, as well as the language of an "absent referent":

> She thought it would be a good idea if they would give anaesthetics to the patients, just put them to sleep while all these necessary physical details were taken care of; she didn't enjoy feeling like a slab of flesh, an object.[142]

As a result, her body feels inanimate, passive and "curiously paralysed"[143]. She perceives other women at the hairdresser as

> a row of strange creatures with legs of various shapes and hands that held magazines and heads that were metal domes. Inert; totally inert. Was this what she was being pushed towards, this compound of the simply vegetable and the simply mechanical? An electric mushroom.[144]

The women are perceived as inanimate passive non-individualistic "creatures", not as human beings. Marian's friend, Ainsley, then does her nails and make-up:

> During the rest of the procedure, while strange things were being done to her skin, then to each eye and each eyebrow, Marian sat passively, marvelling at the professional efficiency with which Ainsley was manipulating her features. [145]

Again, Marian feels like a passive object that becomes paralysed while being manipulated, decorated, and transformed. She suppresses her real self with an artificial one that she wants to offer to Peter: "The self she presents to Peter is intended for his consumption, and his reaction to it is, appropriately enough, "yum yum""[146]. Despite Peter's appreciation she feels uncomfortable as she has lost her true self. Adjusting to Peter's expectations is, therefore, not a solution to her

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142 *The Edible Woman*, p. 262.
143 *The Edible Woman*, p. 262.
144 *The Edible Woman*, p. 263.
145 *The Edible Woman*, p. 278.
146 Tolan, p. 30.

problem. According to Tolan, “Marian has to learn to resist the compulsion to negate her body, which equates with the negation of her feminine self.”[147] She decided to offer Peter a substitute for herself because she realised her real self was incapable of satisfying him. At the beginning of the novel, Peter was complaining that she “can’t [...] ever *cook* anything” – which is a traditional woman’s activity. Marian, paradoxically enough, bakes him a cake in the shape of a woman’s body which is highly decorated just as Marian once was at the party. The cake is a decorated inanimate object that can be consumed and is, therefore, supposed to be the embodiment of what Peter actually wants. However, he refuses to eat it and leaves, and Marian starts to eat the cake herself. According to Tolan, “Her symbolic consumption of the feminine body can be understood as a final acceptance of the bodily self”[148]. Such conclusion can be understood ambiguously. It implies that she does overcome her anorexia nervosa while finally accepting her traditional female role as a part of herself. She literally lets it in while eating it. It can also imply that her revolting subconscious does not have to revolt any more; she has overcome her struggle by realising she has been oppressed and becomes aware of her true, active self.

Similarly to *The Edible Woman*, where Marian develops her anorexia nervosa as a subconscious fight against her oppression, the protagonist of *Surfacing* revalues her past and realises that her position is the one of the passive and the oppressed. She was violated by her lover, who forced her to abort their child. As a result, she is incapable of feeling, and she has to come up with a made-up reality to overcome her trauma. At the beginning, the protagonist is trapped by her own practices of how to define and protect her position; she is “divorced”, yet she is wearing her ring to avoid explaining and vindicating. “But I’m safe, I’m wearing my ring [...]”[149] She feels guilt over leaving her “husband and child”[150] which is aroused by implied repudiation by society. The protagonist perceives marriage as a scheme she does not fit in. Anna and David, a married couple she goes to the remote island with, represent an ideal she would long to embody, too: “They must have some special method, formula, some knowledge I missed out on [...]”[151]. It is only later that she discovers how deceiving the idea of their “ideal” marriage is.

The protagonist’s pregnancy and her relation to the baby is described retrospectively in a

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147 Tolan, p. 21-22.
148 Tolan, p. 34.
149 *Surfacing*, p. 17.
150 *Surfacing*, p. 23.
151 *Surfacing*, p. 34.

cold, detached way:

> [...] I never identified it as mine [...] It was my husband's, he imposed it on me, all the time it was growing in me I felt like an incubator. He measured everything he would let me eat, he was feeding it on me [...][152]

Margaret Atwood uses language similar to the "absent referent" of an animal victim. The protagonist is like controlled cattle that are supposed to breed, to procreate. The description is short of any evidence of motherly love, or a loving relationship of a husband and wife. The protagonist, moreover, needs to watch out: "[...] after it was born I was no more use, he wanted a replica of himself. I couldn't prove it though, he was clever: he kept saying he loved me."[153] She feels exploited, like trapped vulnerable armless cattle that is viciously confirmed of being the opposite: of being loved and needed, in order to stay calm and naïve and, therefore, controllable: "He said he loved me, the magic word, it was supposed to make everything light up, I'll never trust that word again."[154] On the other hand, speaking about the baby in such a cold way can be again perceived as the protagonist's way to protect herself from being hurt, how to persuade herself of something that is not true – as she indeed was hurt: "I have to behave as though it doesn't exist, because for me it can't, it was taken away from me, exported, deported. A section of my own life, sliced off from me like a Siamese twin, my own flesh cancelled."[155] Using such language again, Margaret Atwood makes the link between animal trade and women even more clear; her child is "exported" like a calf from a cow. Her child is her "own flesh" and the word "flesh" implies material, a product, not a human being.

After her "divorce", the protagonist is trapped by her own presumptions of being contemptible that haunt her: "[...] I didn't have any excuses, I was never good at them."[156] She generally does not have any excuses because she does not have any rational reasons for her actions; her actions are driven by something described as "stupidity"[157]. What "stupidity"

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[152] *Surfacing*, p. 28.
[153] *Surfacing*, p. 28.
[154] *Surfacing*, p. 41.
[155] *Surfacing*, p. 42.
[156] *Surfacing*, p. 23.
[157] *Surfacing*, p. 23.

implies, however, is, again, her inability to explain herself and her actions, her struggle of finding who she really is and what she really wants. Yet she is aware of her own difficulty with understanding herself.

As a solution, she tries to suppress her doubts and be like the others. However, her main problem is that she is forcing herself to feel an emotion which she is incapable of, with her current boyfriend, Joe. It is a way how to feel secure, how to define her position. It is easier for her to fix her position as Joe's girlfriend than somebody whose identity is still struggling for a definition. She is with him because "he doesn't make [her] sad"[158], not because he would make her particularly happy.

Fishing provokes the protagonist to ask herself questions considering killing of innocent beings, and helps her realise that she was (and is) actually oppressed, too. "[...] I've killed something, made it dead; but I know that's irrational, killing certain things is all right, food and enemies, fish and mosquitoes; and wasps [...]"[159] Yet again, there is the raised question of the protagonist's "irrational" subjectivity versus "rational and correct" objectivity of the common judging people that haunts her. In her novel, Margaret Atwood also suggests the protagonist's realisation of the traditional passivity of women: "This was never my job; someone else did it, my brother or my father." While the protagonist is eviscerating fish, she realises what her traditional role was – being a passive witness of the killing of another innocent being, "one of the silent guarded faces in the crowd"[160].

The speaker of Sharon Olds' poem "Fishing Off Nova Scotia" from 1980 (see Appendix 1 for the whole poem) similarly describes what it is like to be a passive witness of the cruelty performed on fish in Canada:

> I was playing the mother in this,
> the wife from the States, so I did not speak,
> the steel cracking those clenched jaws,
> the bright glaze of blood on the children.[161]

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158 *Surfacing*, p. 36.
159 *Surfacing*, p. 59.
160 *Surfacing*, p. 124.
161 Sharon Olds, "Fishing Off Nova Scotia," *Crossing Boundaries: An International Anthology of Women's Experiences in Sport*, Susan J. Bandy, Anne S. Darden, eds. (Leeds: Human Kinetics, 1999)

The speaker of the poem is playing her role, a silent – or, more likely, a silenced – mother that is not supposed to protest against the violent behaviour of her children who spitefully scream "Lie still, fishy", "Shut up, fishy"[162]. Sharon Olds implies the mother feels guilt while witnessing the violent act and not raising her voice. Her part of the blame is expressed by female imagery, such as "[…] the hooks jerking / like upholstery needles through the gills"[163]. The protagonist of *Surfacing* realises that her passivity never used to take the blame off her either. The "stupidity"[164] which she described to be the cause of her actions, is then perceived in a different light. It can be seen as something she was manipulated into as a passive victim because of her traditional role. Something she, nevertheless, had to take consequences and responsibility for afterwards. Fiona Tolan suggests that "Passivity is tempting because it seems to confer innocence; the innocents are acted upon, but are not expected to act, and are thus able to distance themselves from guilt"[165]. It is only through the acceptance of her own guilt that she can find her true self. When a heron is killed there, for example, she comes to realise that her being a passive witness makes her, indeed, one of the "killers":

> it was hiding in me as if in a burrow and instead of granting it sanctuary I let them catch it. I could have said no but I didn't; that made me one of them too, a killer.[166]

However, the passivity of witnessing the violence committed on animals can have a different reading when we see the same excerpts as a metaphor to the protagonist's abortion. Later in the book, we realise the protagonist did not leave her "husband" and "child"; moreover, she didn't have a marriage and a divorce either. Her lover made her have an abortion, which was "his idea, his fault"[167]. The reading of the sentence: "A divorce is like an amputation, you survive but there is less of you"[168] can, therefore, be read as her incapability of pulling herself together after the

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[henceforth "Olds"] p. 147.
[162] Olds, p. 147.
[163] Olds, p. 147.
[164] *Surfacing*, p. 23.
[165] Tolan, p. 53.
[166] *Surfacing*, p. 139.
[167] *Surfacing*, p. 74.
[168] *Surfacing*, p. 36.

abortion; she is deeply hurt but pretends to herself that she is not. “I couldn’t accept it, that mutilation, ruin I’d made, I needed a different version”[169] – she makes up a different version, therefore, she does not speak of an abortion but of a divorce. According to Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen,

> What she cannot accept is the fact that she is a young unmarried woman whose love affair with a married man ended when he persuaded her to abort the child she had conceived in the act of love.[170]

Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen draw attention to the sentence “I was emptied, amputated”[171] that implies the link between the actual abortion and “amputation” she felt after her made up “divorce”. She tries to forget about her bad experience and forces herself into another relationship with Joe because he does not “make her sad” and, in a way, helps her unintentionally pretend it did not happen by not being aware that she actually had an abortion.
Her abortion is, again, described in the language dealing with an “absent referent”:

> After the first I didn’t ever want to have another child, it was too much to go through for nothing, they shut you into a hospital, they shave your hair off and tie your hands down and they don’t let you see, they don’t want you to understand, they want you to believe it’s their power, not yours. They stick needles into you so you won’t hear anything, you might as well be a dead pig, your legs are up in a metal frame, they bend over you, technicians, mechanics, butchers, students clumsy or sniggering practising on your body, they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar.[172]

The protagonist feels like a piece of meat that cannot move and is exposed to the will of others; passive because it is dead, absent. Adams points out a drawback of such metaphor, however: “no

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169 *Surfacing*, p. 36.
170 Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen, “'Surfacing': Margaret Atwood's 'Nymph Complaining',” *Contemporary Literature* 20.2 (1979) [henceforth “Hinz”] p. 224.
171 *Surfacing*, p. 138.
172 *Surfacing*, p. 74.

one can really feel like a piece of meat because meat by definition is something violently deprived of all feeling."[173] But I believe this is also the case of the protagonist. Throughout the novel, she complains about not being able to feel any more – she was deprived of her feelings by her abortion, which seems to be the final stage of her objectification. To describe her abortion, Atwood uses language evoking inanimate objects. She is compared to a fragile glass "pickle jar" and the baby to a small crinkled "pickle", both inanimate objects, far from human beings. The aborted baby is remembered as "a cat pickled, it had huge jelly eyes and fins instead of hands, fish gills".[174] The child is spoken of as something either inanimate like the "pickle", or something animal-like – "a cat pickled", or something defined by negation: "It wasn't a child but it could have been one, I didn't allow it."[175] It is not called a child though, not a human being. The protagonist mentions her ex-lover's attitude: "He said it wasn't a person, only an animal."[176] And as an animal, it is much easier to get rid of, because it is seen as an object. As Adams puts it,

> we distance ourselves from whatever is different by equating it with something we have already objectified. For instance, the demarcation between animals and people was invoked during the early modern period to emphasize social distancing. According to Keith Thomas, infants, youth, the poor, blacks, Irish, insane people, and women were considered beastlike: "Once perceived as beasts, people were liable to be treated accordingly. The ethic of human domination removed animals from the sphere of human concern. But it also legitimized the ill-treatment of those humans who were in a supposedly animal condition."[177]

Linking humans to animals not only explains how such ill-treated people may feel, but it also fixes the reasons why they are treated the way they are.

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[173] Adams, p. 67.
[174] *Surfacing*, p. 137.
[175] *Surfacing*, p. 137.
[176] *Surfacing*, p. 138.
[177] Adams, p. 69.

2.3 The Consuming Objects

Margaret Atwood implies in her two novels that her female characters are objectified and victimized by patriarchal society. Nevertheless, she plays with the concept of the consumer and the consumed, as well as the hunter and the hunted. A hunter hunts the hunted, and the consumer consumes the consumed objects. Nevertheless, I believe such terminology lacks another term: a "consuming / hunting object". I have already touched upon the "consuming objects" in section 1.3, where I tried to explain that women want to be perceived as objects because it enables them to have power over men in patriarchal society.

Women in *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* transform into objects; some of them are aware of the transformation and undergo it on purpose, others are not conscious of turning into objects at all. Nevertheless, they both have to pay the price for being the consuming objects: in order to consume, they have to permanently or temporarily consume their real self first, and allow men to consume them, too. One of the reasons why the women became consuming objects is marriage. Especially the "office virgins" desperately want to hunt for themselves a husband. The notion that a woman needs a husband to take care of her is deeply rooted in society, and both men and women are subject to such norm. For example, Clara's husband Joe tends "to think of all unmarried girls as easily victimized and needing protection,"[178] forgetting that it is the need of protection that can victimize them. Similarly, a male respondent of Marian's questionnaire raises his concern over her:

> "Now what's a nice little girl like you doing walking around asking men all about their beer?" he said moistly. "You ought to be at home with some big strong man to take care of you."[179]

He does not think of the fact that domesticity and marriage can symbolically imprison women into their homes, depriving them of the option to have a career, or pursue their dreams out of the domestic field.

Nevertheless, especially the "office virgins" in *The Edible Woman* are unaware of any

[178] *The Edible Woman*, p. 36.
[179] *The Edible Woman*, p. 52.

aims or values that would be more important than marriage. The values of the male characters are diametrically different; one should enjoy single life and only get married when it is absolutely necessary for his status quo. As Peter views it,

> "…A fellow can't keep running around indefinitely. It'll be a lot better in the long run for my practice too, the clients like to know you've got a wife; people get suspicious of a single man after a certain age, they start thinking you're a queer or something."[180]

The women who pursue men are seen as hunting objects. Peter accuses the bride of one of his best friends, Trigger, "of being predatory and malicious and of sucking poor Trigger into the domestic void (making [Marian] picture her as a vacuum-cleaner)"[181], an inanimate sucking object. Similarly, Atwood uses the language of fishing again, this time to present the "office virgins" as hunting objects. One of the "office virgins", Lucy, is described as

> trailing herself like a many-plumed fish-lure with glass beads and three spinners and seventeen hooks through the likely-looking places, good restaurants and cocktail bars with their lush weed-beds of potted philodendrons, where the right kind of men might be expected to be lurking, ravenous as pike, though more maritally inclined. But those men, the right kind, weren't biting, or had left for other depths, or were snapping at a different sort of bait – some inconspicuous brown-plastic minnow or tarnished simple brass spoon, or something with even more feathers and hooks than Lucy could manage.[182]

Lucy is like a lure that is supposed to catch the hungry fish; she needs to be consumed in order to survive. Men know women are "after them" and the game of who, according to their perspective, catches the other one first can begin. Len gives Marian advice on the game from his male perspective:

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[180] *The Edible Woman*, p. 106.
[181] *The Edible Woman*, p. 74.
[182] *The Edible Woman*, p. 134-135.

> "[…] you've got to watch these women when they start pursuing you. They're always after you to *marry* them. You've got to hit and run. Get them before they get you and then get out." He smiled, showing his brilliantly-polished white teeth.[183]

His white teeth can be seen as a metaphor for the consumption of the female body; similarly to food Len consumes with his teeth, he consumes his objects by sexual intercourse. Adams sees consumption as "the final stage of male sexual desire"[184]; the sexually desired object is viewed as consumable. When Lucy flirts with Leonard and Peter at the party, she becomes the hunter, using her feminine "weapons". However, the hunter/target roles only seem to be interchanged. Using her sexuality, she becomes the passive object of the male gaze that is hunted by her own submission – she is consumable.

Adams also believes that objectification goes hand in hand with fragmentation, and leads to guiltless consumption:

> Through fragmentation the object is severed from its ontological meaning. Finally, consumed, it exists only through what it represents. The consumption of the referent reiterates its annihilation as a subject of importance in itself.[185]

The female characters of the two novels are sometimes fragmented into body parts that are connected with sexuality. Such fragmentation enables to perceive them as objects that have been deprived of their subject meaning (see Appendix 2 for illustration). Anna, for example, is referred to as a "cunt on four legs"[186]. Her husband, David, says he married a "pair of boobs"[187]. Anna is punished for, as David says, "manipulate[ing] [him] into it, […] when [he] was studying for the ministry."[188] She will always be viewed as an object, which allows him to treat her suchlike. Their relationship, unlike the humorous one of Len and Ainsley, is not a game of who gets the

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183 *The Edible Woman*, p. 76.
184 Adams, p. 75.
185 Adams, p. 73.
186 *Surfacing*, p. 145.
187 *Surfacing*, p. 132.
188 *Surfacing*, p. 132.

other one first, but a war of the sexes. As Atwood writes,

> her body [was] her only weapon and she was fighting for her life, he was her life, her life was the fight: she was fighting him because if she ever surrendered the balance of power would be broken and he would go elsewhere. To continue the war.[189]

Anna is defined by her husband; he is seen as the essential subject and she is only an object dependent on him.

Ainsley, who is much more intelligent, is less objectified than both Anna and the "office virgins", and decides to turn into an image corresponding to Len's fantasy of an ideal woman, in order to conceive a child and become an independent mother.[190] To succeed, she has to transform herself into a "lure", just like Lucy. Atwood also uses the language of fragmentation to enable her consumption: "The first thing Marian's eyes encountered as her head emerged periscope-like through the stairwell was a pair of naked legs. They were topped by Ainsley, who was standing half-dressed in the small vestibule"[191]. Marian sees her as a doll, something inanimate:

> I studied her latest version of herself, thinking that it was like one of the large plump dolls in the stores at Christmas-time, with washable rubber-smooth skin and glassy eyes and gleaming artificial hair. Pink and white.[192]

When she transforms herself into an image that is objectified, she cannot acts as a subject any longer: "she couldn't even talk back: it was necessary for her mind to appear as vacant as her face. Her hands were tied. She had constructed her image and now she had to maintain it."[193] Although to Len she may appear "as young and inexperienced as a button mushroom"[194] – again something inanimate and, therefore, easily manipulated – she is in reality "a scheming superfemale carrying out a foul plot against him, using him in effect as an inexpensive substitute

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189 *Surfacing*, p. 147.
190 She fails to stick to her idea of independent motherhood when she realises that a childs needs a father-image, and eventually finds a substitute for Len, however.
191 *The Edible Woman*, p. 143.
192 *The Edible Woman*, p. 79.
193 *The Edible Woman*, p. 144.
194 *The Edible Woman*, p. 148.

for artificial insemination with a devastating lack of concern for his individuality." [195] Atwood humorously points out, however, that Len obviously does not care for Ainsley's individuality either. She lets her male character be "consumed" in order to show that the "consumption" of men is considered twisted in patriarchal society:

> Len had been gradually bristling and swelling. "Well I'm not so damn happy about it," he burst out. "All along you've only been *using* me. What a moron I was to think you were sweet and innocent, when it turns out you were actually college-educated the whole time! Oh, they're all the same. You weren't interested in *me* at all. The only thing you wanted from me was my body!"
> "What did you want," Ainsley asked sweetly, "from me? […]"[196]

Atwood shows the sexes play a game of power in order to pursue their interest, which is pleasure in the case of Len and motherhood in case of Ainsley: "as long as he hasn't got me," claims Ainsley, "I can have him whenever I need him."[197] Ainsley can only succeed if she uses certain strategies, however; she must not appear as a predator to Len. Len himself is perceived as a predator when he is interested in having sex with her. Only by camouflaging her predatory aims, by turning herself into an object, she can "get" him: "It was like escaping from a giant squid, but I did it, mostly by acting dumb and scared. That's very necessary at this stage, you know."[198]

Ainsley is a predator, a hunter, even though her power can, by definition, never be as strong as male. To let Marian know that she "got" Len, she is planning to hang a tie on the doorknob. The tie turns into a trophy in Atwood's imagery: "Marian had a disturbing vision of a trophy room with stuffed and antlered heads nailed to the walls. 'Why not just use his scalp?' she asked."[199]

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[195] *The Edible Woman*, p. 148.
[196] *The Edible Woman*, p. 194-195.
[197] *The Edible Woman*, p. 102.
[198] *The Edible Woman*, p. 100.
[199] *The Edible Woman*, p. 147.

2.4 Survival

The protagonist of *Surfacing* decides not to repress her guilt any more and comes out of her struggle with a peculiar solution. She decides to symbolically accept the idea of a child being an animal, as her ex-lover implied, and conceives a child in nature. As Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen suggest,

> As the animal grows inside her, she becomes less human and more animal: "I stay on the bank, resting, licking the scratches; no fur yet on my skin, it's too early" [...]; her major concern is that her erstwhile friends who are looking for her will "mistake me for a human being"[200]

Accepting the role she once rejected, she may actually achieve rescue. Margaret Atwood comes with an ambiguous solution indeed; the protagonist is going to have a baby with Joe, a man she does not truly love, in order to fulfil what was once interrupted and become whole again: by impregnating her, "he's given [her] the part of himself [she] needed"[201]. By claiming that "The baby will slip out easily as an egg, a kitten"[202], she wants to free her new pregnancy of anything human-like that she has once experienced as evil. According to Fiona Tolan,

> [...] the narrator discovers an alternative, feminine and more natural pattern, in which the site of initiation and termination is the feminine body[203] [...] the narrator must come to accept her relationship with the maternal that she has wilfully repressed; she must relinquish her socialised fear of the feminine and the natural, and learn to embrace them instead.[204]

While accepting the animal-like concept she finds roots with nature that offers her liberation and redemption. Unlike Marian, she does see mystical power in maternity. "I am by myself; this is

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200 Hinz, p. 228.
201 *Surfacing,* p. 156.
202 *Surfacing,* p. 156.
203 Tolan, p. 46.
204 Tolan, p. 50.

what I wanted"[205], she claims, and the reader can believe that she really found what she wanted and that she finally achieved her own personal victory: "As she retreats from society, the narrator believes that, alone, she can overcome the alienation from her true self, symbolised by her lost memories, and recover her authenticity"[206]. It is paradoxical, however, that while hiding in nature, she claims: "I can't stay here forever, there isn't enough food."[207] Also, she seems to compromise her formally radical ideas about violence on animals: "I can catch a bird or fish, with my hands, that will be fair."[208] From her tone, we can have a feeling that she again tries to convince herself of something she still struggles with; that she tries to vindicate herself in order to take her blame of killing animals for food, without actually being satisfied with her vindication. She tends to follow the common idea that "enemies and food could be killed"[209] and she seems to forget her fundamental conviction that she "couldn't [kill]any more" and that she had "no right to"[210] kill. The radicalism of the statement that "[a]nything we could do to the animals we could do to each other: we practised on them first"[211] seems to be lost. Moreover, her symbolical acceptance of "animality" can yet again imply an act of surrender; while "rejecting" the idea of herself being a human being, she exposes herself as an animal that can be haunted and chased by others. The ending of *Surfacing* can, therefore, be read ambiguously as both a victory and liberation, or a failure and surrender.

The ending of *The Edible Woman* can also be read ambiguously. The novel ends with first singular narrative, just as it started, and Marian is able to eat again. However, it is questionable in what sense she approached her femininity – whether she decided to subject her femininity again by "eating a humble pie" or whether she decided to be totally independent while rejecting the traditional role. The first reading could be justified by a sentence from the penultimate chapter of the book: "Peter was not the enemy after all, he was just a normal human being like most other people"[212]. Such statement implies that she may actually "succeed" in adjusting into the society, because it may be easier for her to follow "most other people" – the majority that determines

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[205] *Surfacing*, p. 163.
[206] Tolan, p.42.
[207] *Surfacing*, p. 183.
[208] *Surfacing*, p. 175.
[209] *Surfacing*, p. 124.
[210] *Surfacing*, p. 114.
[211] *Surfacing*, p. 115.
[212] *The Edible Woman*, p. 343.

what it is like to be “normal”, and that defines the traditional roles of women. “What she really wanted, she realized, had been reduced to simple safety,”[213] and Marian will be safer if she does not fight against her “enemies”.

2.5 The Wreck

I would like to conclude my thesis metaphorically with the help of Adrienne Rich’s poem “Diving into the Wreck” that was published one year after *Surfacing*, in 1973 (see Appendix 3 for the whole poem). The speaker of the poem dives into “the deep element” of the sea, in order to explore “the wreck and not the story of the wreck / the thing itself and not the myth”. In *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing*, Margaret Atwood dives into the sea to explore the original, natural womanhood. Such womanhood, is, similarly to Adrienne Rich’s “wreck”, lying damaged at the sea bottom; the speaker may come there to see “the treasures that prevail”, but she is forced to leave them at the bottom. She surfaces with the knowledge of the “wreck” whose usefulness on “this scene” I read ambiguously; she may have enriched herself by the knowledge but the society is not going to embrace such ideology. I believe the conclusion of the poem is very similar to the message of Margaret Atwood’s two novels:

> We are, I am, you are
> by cowardice or courage
> the one who find our way
> back to this scene
> carrying a knife, a camera
> a book of myths
> in which
> our names do not appear.[214]

The speaker of the poem surfaces back not only with the knowledge about the “wreck”, but also with three typically male elements: a violent “knife”, an objectifying “camera”, and a “book of

[213] *The Edible Woman*, p. 332.
[214] Rich, p. 143.

myths" that was written from the male perspective. She "find[s her] way back to this scene", a scene that is unaware of the truth and would presumably not accept it anyway:

> They would never believe it's only a natural woman, state of nature, they think of that as a tanned body on a beach with washed hair waving like scarves; not this, face dirt-caked and streaked, skin grimed and scabby, hair like a frayed bath-mat stuck with leaves and twigs.[215]

The protagonist of *The Edible Woman* dives into the third person singular and anorexia nervosa, in order to find her true self at the "sea bottom" that is, however, hard to sustain on "this scene". The protagonist of *Surfacing* dives into nature, animality, and even madness, but she is, again, unable to blend her animality with the human, enemy perspective of "this scene".

The protagonists cannot identify with the idea of womanhood of the "scene" of patriarchal society. I would argue that the "office virgins", Ainsley and Anna to some extent do. They have accepted their position as "objects" and try to make the best use of their objectification. The victimization and objectification of women can, therefore, easily take place when the women themselves allow to be victimized and objectified. The protagonists of both novels do not identify with such women, but society and the system block their existence as "subjects". In *Survival*, Atwood lists four "Basic Victim Positions" that support this idea:

> Position One: To deny the fact that you are a victim. […]
> Position Two: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, but to explain this as an act of Fate, the Will of God, the dictates of Biology (in the case of women, for instance), the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the Unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea. […]
> Position Three: To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable. […]
> Position Four: To be a creative non-victim. […][216]

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[215] *Surfacing*, p. 184.
[216] Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Limited, 1972) [henceforth "*Survival*"] p. 36-38.

Atwood explains she based her model "on individual rather than social experience"[217] and she devised it not as "the answer to everything"[218]. Because of its simplification and generalization, the model may not be applicable to all the victims of Canadian literature in general, but I believe it helps understanding Margaret Atwood's own novels. The protagonists oscillate between these positions, but they never reach the ideal state. In her 1979 "Introduction" to *The Edible Woman*, Atwood claims:

> It's noteworthy that my heroine's choices remain much the same at the end of the book as they are at the beginning: a career going nowhere, or marriage as an exit from it. But these were the options for a young woman, even a young educated woman, in Canada in the early sixties.[219]

Atwood suggests that the passivity of women is socially, culturally and psychologically constructed and difficult to escape from. The protagonists seem to be stuck on "Position Three". The society does not allow them to become non-victimized "subjects"; they are perceived as "objects" instead of "subjects". The protagonists cannot become "creative non-victims" as in the ideal "Position Four" because one protagonist cannot change the entire oppressed society. According to Atwood, "the external and/or internal causes of victimization" need to be removed, and you cannot become an ex-victim "until the entire society's position has been changed"[220]. The women in the two novels can, therefore, not be divided into "subjects" and "objects". They can, however, be divided into those who do not mind taking advantage of their objectification, and those who do because it is against their conviction. Taking advantage of the objectification only leads to hypocrisy and the loss of the real self, however. The "office virgins", Ainsley and Anna – who I consider "consuming objects" – "consume" single men, but in order to do so, they must have "consumed" their real selves first. They have exchanged their natural womanhood for the patriarchal idea of an objectified woman. On the other hand, the protagonists that I perceive

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[217] *Survival*, p. 40.
[218] *Survival*, p. 39.
[219] Margaret Atwood, "Introduction," *The Edible Woman* (London: Virago Press, 2009) [henceforth "Introduction"] p. X.
[220] *Survival*, p. 38.

as “consumed objects” are both “hunted” and “consumed” by the idea of womanhood that has been accepted as standard, and which has been deprived of its origins that rest damaged at the bottom of Adrienne Rich’s “sea”. The original womanhood, the “wreck”, can no longer be seen. Nevertheless, Margaret Atwood attempts to reveal the “wreck” to her reader; similarly to her poem “This Is a Photograph of Me”, Atwood cries in her two novels from under the surface, and reveals the idea of true womanhood:

> if you look long enough
> eventually
> you will be able to see [it].[221]

But even though you may see it, the others will not. And to survive among them is not a question of victory or defeat, nor is it a question of “cowardice or courage” as Adrienne Rich suggests. It is the inevitable task.

[221] Margaret Atwood, “This Is a Photograph of Me,” *Selected Poems: 1965-1975* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1987) p. 8.

Conclusion

The Edible Woman and *Surfacing* can be read as novels dealing with the struggle of identity performed by its objectified and victimized protagonists. They try to find their true selves by revaluing their situations – especially the past in the case of *Surfacing*, and the future in the case of *The Edible Woman*. Although both novels are ambiguously read as both a victory and a defeat, they do not bring the most optimistic conclusion anyway, as Atwood does not really provide a solution to the problem of objectification and victimization of women. The only victory available for them in the current system is survival. Margaret Atwood herself said that "*The Edible Woman* is a circle and *Surfacing* is a spiral"[222]. The protagonists of both novels realise they are oppressed, either by the "rationality" they were manipulated into by the society, or by the roles the society expected of them. They become aware both of their passivity and their victimization, but do not necessarily find a way out.

The aim of my thesis was to explore the ways Atwood uses to imply that women are objectified and victimized by men, but most importantly, by the entire society. In the first chapter, I explored that a woman is seen as an object, rather than a subject, which is a quality traditionally assigned to a man. I demonstrated that the camera can be seen as a weapon that enables to objectify women in patriarchal society even further. Photography results in a literal objectification, as it produces a material image that can be looked at, displayed or classified according to the will of the owner of the image. The camera is also seen as the extension of the male gaze that helps the man take control of the woman by seeing her as a sexualized object. Furthermore, photography can manipulate by presenting a shaped, fragmented version of reality.

The second chapter explored the connections between female and animal victims. The female body can be metaphorically compared to meat; in order to "consume" it, the consumer has to objectify it and fragment it first. I divided the female characters of *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* into "consumed objects" and "consuming objects" according to their awareness and/or attitude to their objectification. The women who can be seen as "consumed objects" attempt to change their situation and fail. According to *Survival*, it is the oppressive society that does not allow them to become "creative non-victims". On the other hand, the "consuming objects" deny their position as victims and take advantage of their objectification, which is the only way how

[222] Tolan, p. 34.

they can gain power and reverse the concept of control. All women struggle to survive in their own way; the “consumed objects” try to become and remain subjects, and later give up, and the “consuming objects” would do anything to become attractive and pursue a simple goal as a result: marriage.

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Appendixes:

Appendix 1. “Fishing Off Nova Scotia” by Sharon Olds

Visiting their father’s childhood home,
a blood culture, the children that week
were raised on blood. They let the line out
and let it out and let it out,
the sea was so deep.

We were floating in a small dory on top of those
tons of water. They yanked the line
up from the bottom, over and over,
jigging for fish: the hooks jerking
like upholstery needles through the gills.

It made a sound like plastic being broken
to get the barb out. In a wooden box
in the bottom of the boat, the supple metal
bodies would slap and twist, silver
gods dug up. *Lie still, fishy,*
the kids would say, *Shut up, fishy,*
with scales on their hands and traces of gut on their shoes.

I was playing the mother in this,
the wife from the States, so I did not speak,
the steel cracking those clenched jaws,
the bright glaze of blood on the children.

(1980)

Appendix 2. The illustration from the 2010 20th anniversary edition cover of Carol J. Adams's *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*

Appendix 3. “Diving into the Wreck” by Adrienne Rich

First having read the book of myths,
and loaded the camera,
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,
I put on
the body-armor of black rubber
the absurd flippers
the grave and awkward mask.
I am having to do this
not like Cousteau with his
assiduous team
aboard the sun-flooded schooner
but here alone.

There is a ladder.
The ladder is always there
hanging innocently
close to the side of the schooner.
We know what it is for,
we who have used it.
Otherwise
it is a piece of maritime floss
some sundry equipment.

I go down.
Rung after rung and still
the oxygen immerses me
the blue light
the clear atoms
of our human air.

I go down.
My flippers cripple me,
I crawl like an insect down the ladder
and there is no one
to tell me when the ocean
will begin.

First the air is blue and then
it is bluer and then green and then
black I am blacking out and yet
my mask is powerful
it pumps my blood with power
the sea is another story
the sea is not a question of power
I have to learn alone
to turn my body without force
in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget
what I came for
among so many who have always
lived here
swaying their crenellated fans
between the reefs
and besides
you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done

and the treasures that prevail.
I stroke the beam of my lamp
slowly along the flank
of something more permanent
than fish or weed

the thing I came for:
the wreck and not the story of the wreck
the thing itself and not the myth
the drowned face always staring
toward the sun
the evidence of damage
worn by salt and away into this threadbare beauty
the ribs of the disaster
curving their assertion
among the tentative haunters.

This is the place.
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
streams black, the merman in his armored body.
We circle silently
about the wreck
we dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes
whose breasts still bear the stress
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies
obscurely inside barrels
half-wedged and left to rot
we are the half-destroyed instruments

that once held to a course
the water-eaten log
the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
back to this scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.

(1973)